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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

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**The Parable of the Shrewd Steward**

**Luke 16:1-9**

**Prayer:** *Father, we just want to thank you for your grace, we want to thank you for this time that we have. First of all, I just thank you for corporate worship, for the privilege that it is, for the fact that we can still gather in a community and not worry about our doors being broken down and physical harm coming to us as comes to so many, particularly our brothers and sisters in Egypt right now who are being singled out for persecution, torture, and murder. We just lift them up, we pray for grace and strength for them and we just thank you that as yet, we have not had anything remotely like that, and so I just pray that we could use this time, use the power of your Holy Spirit to open up our eyes and our ears as we open up your book and we pray that it would be of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are looking at the biblical concept of stewardship. And I said last time that stewardship is far, far more than just giving money to a church. Stewardship is really a measure of your spiritual health. Born again believers in Jesus Christ are people

who know they have been ransomed by the blood of the perfect Son of God, who died in their place. They know they are new creatures; they are temples of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8 says: *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.* You see, when God lives in us, he changes our thoughts, our drives, our appetites, and our passions so that our passion becomes the kingdom of God. Stewardship is really just a measure of that passion.

We said stewardship defines how much you own the kingdom of God and how much the kingdom of God owns you. We've been looking at three different aspects of what stewardship is. We are looking at how a steward thinks, how he plans, and how he acts. Last time out we looked at how stewards think. We saw first that a steward's thinking is faithful, and that that faithfulness is the great leveler. You see, if I've been given five talents and you've been given three, God's expectation is that I'm going to faithfully steward those five; you're going to faithfully steward those three or two or one or ten. It doesn't really matter what the level of giftedness is. What matters is how faithful you are to the gifts that God has given you. That's how God judges us, by rewarding faithfulness instead of bottom line results.

We saw secondly that a steward's thinking is rooted in loyalty. He understands that divided loyalties produce nothing but resentment. Matthew 6:24 says: *"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other."* Finally we saw that his thinking is joyful. It's joyful because he understands that simply being faithful to what you've been given levels the playing field for everyone. God takes just as much delight in the faithful one talent steward investing his talent as he does in the five talent steward. And you know, that gives the guy who cleans the carpet the exact same status before God as the guy who preaches the sermons. His joy stems from understanding that faithfulness is God's measure of success and not just bottom line accomplishments. He understands therefore that there -- because of that, there really is no "little people" in God's kingdom. So that's how stewards think.

Today we're going to look at how stewards plan, and to do that, we're going to look at another story that Jesus told about stewards. This one concentrates on the plans of one steward that Jesus commended for his shrewdness. In fact, the story is called the parable of the shrewd steward. It's in Luke 16:1-9. Let me just read to you. These are Jesus' words: *He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges*

were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. And he called him and he said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.' So summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into eternal dwellings."

There's no question this is a difficult story. I mean, it appears at first glance that Jesus is commending dishonesty. After all, verse 8 says, "The master commended the dishonest steward." Well, there's a great deal going on here in this story that at first escapes our notice. For one, this is a 2,000-year-old story and

it's told in a very different time, in a very different culture and much of what Jesus is saying we simply don't understand in a 21st century North American context. So first of all, Jesus is not commending dishonesty. It's the master in the story and not Jesus who is doing the commending and it's not dishonesty he commends, it is shrewdness. The text says: *"The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness."* This is also not necessarily a happy commendation. You know, I can almost picture the master kind of stroking his beard, you know, and shaking his head and saying, "Very shrewd," you know, "Very shrewd indeed." This is not a happy commendation; it is begrudging. And as we look at the story, we will see why. But in order to understand the story, you really first have to understand the Middle Eastern mindset. There are two prevailing forces that govern most of life in the Middle East, they are honor and shame, and almost nothing else matters. You know, most of us have heard of this horrifying practice of honor killings, if a female brings shame somehow to the family by marrying outside of the family pledges and the family ones that are set aside for them, by refusing to get married in one of these arranged marriages or even by having the unfortunate circumstance of being raped. Very frequently she is liable to be murdered by her father, by her brothers, by her cousins in some kind of sick and twisted means of restoring honor to the family. We've discovered that that still happens frequently in the Middle East.

See, life in this culture, it revolves around honor and shame. And what we don't see in this story of the shrewd manager is the -- is that aspect of shame here. You see, it is this aspect that Jesus is really playing off in this story. You see, a master who has been taken by his steward is someone who has been deeply shamed. In fact, worse than the offense is the shame. And you know, the more people know about the master being shamed, the more he appears the fool and the less chance he's going to be able to manage his other stewards. And the master in this story reveals that the situation has blown up in the worst possible way when it comes to this idea of shame. He says this, he says, "*What is this that I hear about you?*" In other words, the secret is out. The master's clients, the master's friends, all of them, they all know about it now. Now it's common knowledge that the steward has shamed him. So how does the master end up commending him? Well, again, we have to know something about how life and business is conducted then and there, and the more you understand the culture, the more obvious it becomes that there really was something fishy going on.

Hampton Keathly in *Bible.org* does a great job of pointing out some of the cultural clues as to why something fishy was going on in this story. You see, the business the steward conducted was typical for that day and that time but it was almost certainly in violation of Jewish law. Exodus 22:25 is one of a number of

scriptures that all point to the same thing. It says this, it says: *"If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a money lender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him."* You see, a Jew was not to charge his fellow Jew excessive interest on business deals. Now, in order to get around that, they would just factor the interest into the final payment. Hampton Keathly pointed out that the Jewish historian Josephus acknowledged this was a common practice in the day. In fact, Josephus goes on to even give the percentages that were normally charged. He said olive oil was a very volatile commodity, had an interest rate close to a hundred percent. Wheat was far less volatile, its rate was about 20 to 25 percent, and in each case the borrower would be given an amount to sign and then sign an agreement to pay back a different amount, an amount that included but did not mention the interest. So if I wanted to borrow a hundred bushels of wheat from you -- I'm sorry, if I wanted to borrow eighty bushels of wheat, I would just write an arrangement to give you back a hundred. If I wanted to do business with you for olive oil, I would borrow fifty gallons and then I would agree to pay you back a hundred. Those were the prevailing rates for those two commodities and those happened to be the exact discounts the steward gave. In verse 5, he says: *"So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to*

him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness." You see, all the steward did was he made the transaction strictly legal again.

Unless you think this is far-fetched, Mr. Keathly points out how far these folks would go to get around the established laws. He gives one example, he said, you know the law said you could not work on the Sabbath. And after a while the issue was raised, okay, what about milking cows? Cows don't care whether or not it's the Sabbath, they only know that if the cow is not milked, it's going to grow very, very uncomfortable. And so in order to provide comfort for the cows, it was decided that they could indeed be milked on a Sabbath but the milk would have to be poured out on the rocks. Well, it didn't take very long before some enterprising businessmen were lining their milk buckets with sterilized rocks so that the milk that flowed onto those rocks was now legal to sell. See, what mattered was not the spirit of the law, that is the intent of the law, that was completely irrelevant to these people. Instead what mattered was the letter of the law, its technicality. Technically the master wasn't charging any interest, he was just playing the game like everybody else played, but Jesus hated that



attitude, and he constantly exposed it.

And so this steward in our story is shrewd indeed. He knows exactly how the system works and he's working it to his and his master's advantage. You see, his one action of discounting his master's goods did really three major things. First, it redeemed the outstanding bills. I mean, it made sure that the master would at least get his principle back, if not the interest; secondly, it restored honor to the master by restoring his reputation as a fair and generous business man; and third, it reserved a place and a relationship for this steward when he knew his job was coming to an end. So this shrewd steward's produced redemption, restoration, and new relationships all the in one desperate act.

Now, you could ask was it dishonest? And the answer is yes, it was, absolutely. In fact, Jesus says so in verse 8, it says: "*The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.*" So there's no doubt this guy was crooked but so was everybody else in the story, the master, the steward, and most likely the customers. The likely question then is isn't Jesus commending dishonesty? Well, remember, it's not Jesus who commended the steward, it's the manager in the story, and he's commending shrewdness. He's not commending honesty. What Jesus is doing is he's pointing out that there's this vast difference between being shrewd on the one hand

and being wise on the other. Being shrewd means understanding the best way to accomplish something regardless of the ethics. Being wise is skillfully living your life in relation to your creator because wisdom is always related to your relationship with God. Psalm 111, verse 10 says: *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding.* You see, Jesus was using the story to address two different groups of people, something he frequently did. And to the disciples on one hand, he's dispensing wisdom; to the Pharisees on the other hand, he is dispensing a warning. You know, the story begins by saying, *"Jesus told his disciples."* So we know the disciples are the primary target. Now, his secondary target were these people who are in reality just shrewd hypocrites. People who were so two-faced and so used to this dishonest double standard that they would hear and identify precisely with the characters Jesus is laying out, and that's exactly what they did. You know, verse 14 says this, it says: *The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.* They were furious. They got what Jesus was saying. And so they started mocking him. They were mocking him because they were, as they said, busted. Jesus had their number. The Pharisees were one of the first in a very long line of these "name it, claim it" hypocrites, and they taught that those whom God truly loves, he blesses, and those whom he blesses are rich. They just happened to be rich themselves. And

therefore those who are rich were especially blessed of the Lord. They were blessed by God himself.

Well, you know, it's no surprise that the very next story that Jesus tells in Luke 16 is Jesus teaching about the rich man and Lazarus which is a story about a rich man in hell. My guess is that Jesus is speaking directly to those Pharisees. He tells them flat out in Luke 16:15, he says: *"You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts."* Now he's telling them, you can play around all you want with the technicalities and the law and you can fool the simple folk into thinking you bask in God's blessings because you're rich. But then he goes on to say: *"What is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God."* You know, the Pharisees thought they could fool everyone. They wound up literally trying to fool God himself which is a very, very bad move. Jesus aims the story's hypocritical dishonesty directly at the Pharisees, and he scores a direct hit but then he aims the shrewdness of the steward at his disciples. He says in verse 8: *"The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings."*

You see, there were three things the steward did that made him a very shrewd man. Once again, it's what all good stewards do: He thought, he planned, and he acted. Now, his first shrewd move here was that he thought. He put on his thinking cap, and he started working through what was going on and what he saw was that his time was limited. We see this right at the start. In verse 3, it says this: *"And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.'"* So the first thing a shrewd steward does is he recognizes the problem. Life was going to change and it was going to change drastically, and he knew that he was not prepared.

So what is Jesus trying to tell us through this story? Just like the steward, every one of our lives is going to change drastically. One thing we know for certain is they're all going to come to an end. We, too, are someday "not going to manage our lives any longer." You see, a wise person knows this and he acts on it. An unwise person knows this, and he doesn't act on it. And a fool, a fool doesn't even know it. Psalm 14:1 says: *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."* Many of us live out our lives with no place in our hearts whatsoever for God. He is seen

as an intrusion, some kind of resented demand or a dim childhood memory easily dismissed, and for those folks, the very first time they really think about God will be when they stand before him to give an account. Well, the shrewd steward, he actually thought through his circumstances to its conclusion. He did what any shrewd person would do, he took action to head off this disastrous change in his circumstance. Now it's safe to say that a hundred years from now, every one of us is going to have those same circumstances. It was George Bernard Shaw who said, "The statistics on death are one out of one." Everybody dies. Every one of us is not going to manage our lives any longer.

Randy Alcorn in his superb little book *The Treasure Principle* describes life as this dot. He says just like a dot, it begins and it ends. That's all there is to it. In the grand scheme of things, life is exceedingly brief. God calls it a mist. He calls it a vapor. But that dot which represents our life on earth is only the beginning, and from that dot there extends a line, and that line goes on forever. Randy points out that right now we all live inside the dot. He says but what is it that we're living for? Is it the dot or is it the line? You see, it is the fool who lives for the dot. It is a wise person who lives for the line. You know, there's an exercise, I've done this many, many times, I've done this before and many of you here will be familiar with

this, but I do it individually a lot of times. I'll do it collectively this morning just to give us a perspective on the difference between the dot and the line. I just want you to think about, I just want you to concentrate for a moment, see if you can tell me something about your great great great great grandfather or grandmother. Now, I say "great great great great" 'cause that represents four different generations, that takes us back somewhere into the 1860's. My guess is that none of you can tell me anything about your great great great great grandfather 'cause you don't know anything. But you see, only four generations ago, it was your ancestors who were alive living in their dot. I assure you, they had the exact same concerns that we do. They were concerned about their lives, their families, their jobs, their commitments and today, all trace of that dot is gone. Most of us don't even know their names any more, and if they've lived for the dot, well, they've been completely forgotten. They've been forgotten by us. Mind you, we're their flesh and blood; we don't even know who they are. Not a trace of what mattered to them remains. Now, if they had lived for the line, well it's a vastly different story. Psalm 103 sums this up perfectly. Listen to what it says. Psalm 103:15 says this, it says: *As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who*

*fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments. Now, you see, the shrewd steward was just that, he was shrewd but he wasn't wise. He was fixed on the dot and not on the line. All he cared about was taking care of his future here on earth. Now, the reason why Jesus gives us this story is that his means for securing the dot, well, they were well worth noting. He didn't just think through his circumstances. And that takes us to our second point: He planned in reaction to his circumstance. He said, 'I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.'* Now, the people in these houses that he was obviously consumed with, well we all know they would have disappeared thousands of years ago. They don't exist at all now. Those are not the kind of houses that we should be looking for. Jesus tells us what those houses are. He says this in verse 9, he says: *"And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings."* What he's saying is simply what you spend today making friends for yourselves spiritually will pay eternal dividends not just tomorrow but forever. What you do while you are in the dot will affect everything that happens to you while you are in the line.

Now, we don't get to the eternal dwellings by any other means other than perfection, and if you know one thing, you know that we don't have that perfection. Romans 3:10 says: *As it is written, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."* We know that Jesus Christ alone led a perfect, sinless life, and that His perfection alone is transferred to us by faith in his sacrifice on the cross, and that alone is what makes us worthy of heaven. That's the key to the kingdom. But once we enter the kingdom, our placement is going to be established by how we steward our resources right now.

Randy Alcorn writing in *The Treasure Principle* says this: "Is this a biblical concept? Absolutely. Paul spoke about the Philippians financial giving and explained 'not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account (Philippians 4:17). God keeps an account open us for in heaven and every gift given for his glory is a deposit in that account. Not only God, not only others, but we are the eternal beneficiaries of our giving. (Have you been making regular deposits?) But isn't it wrong to be motivated by reward? No, it isn't. If it were wrong, Christ wouldn't offer it to us as a motivation. Reward is his idea, not ours.'"



Now, the wise steward, he thought only about himself when he was planning his future. He was single-minded and self-seeking both in his thinking and his planning, and this is the part we have a very hard time with. Jesus commends him. Now hear me very carefully. Jesus still commends single-minded, self-seeking planning as long as it's for eternal life in the line and not for this temporary life in the dot. It was Jesus who said if you are wise, you will pursue your own eternal future in a single-minded and yes, self-seeking way. He said in eternal matters it is okay to single-mindedly be looking out for number one.

You see, you cannot seek the kingdom with divided loyalties. We saw that last week Matthew 6:24: *"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other."* And what Jesus is telling us in this parable, he said, if you single-mindedly and selfishly set your sights on the kingdom of God, you're not just shrewd, you are wise. Listen very carefully to Jesus' Words In Matthew 6:19. He says this, he says: *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* You notice something? You notice what he does twice in that passage? Twice in that passage Jesus

uses the phrase "for yourselves." *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven."* Now he's saying do this for yourself, store up this treasure for yourself. That's selfish. And according to Christ himself, that's perfectly okay. You know why? Jesus tells us in verse 2, he says: *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* Jesus is saying single-mindedly pursue treasure in heaven and your heart's going to come right to the cross.

And this is part three. Again, part one is thinking like a wise steward instead of just a shrewd one, it's realizing that we either live in this tiny dot in the here and now or we live for the eternal line that starts with a dot and goes on forever. And part two is planning. Again, Randy Alcorn says financial planners, well they plan for 30 or 40 years. And the steward, his plan was for -- went no further than finding a home. Wise stewards plan for 30, 40 million years and beyond. They plan for eternity.

And part three is acting. The wise steward, he doesn't just think, he doesn't just plan; he acts. You see, all the planning in the world is useless if it remains theory instead of practice. And we saw the shrewd steward active. He redeemed the outstanding bills, he restored honor to the master by restoring his reputation as a fair and generous businessman and he also reserved these brand new

relationships for himself when his job was over. We see redemption and restoration and relationship all as actions that he did. But somebody will say, "But they were dishonest actions." Well, you know, in all of these things, a shrewd steward used wise means to an unwise end. This treasure was strictly earth bound. Again, verse 4, he says, *'I have decided what to do so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.'* Understand that Jesus is commending his means but not his end. He tells the disciples that the houses that they need to focus on are not earthly, they are eternal. Jesus calls us to use wise means to wise ends. As stewards, we are called on to manage the treasure that God has placed within us. That treasure, as I said right from the start, is the Spirit of God himself. Jesus said this in John 7:38, he says: *"Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."* By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. You see, if you truly are one of His, you too will have that treasure, which is God's spirit, you will have that treasure inside of you. And unlike the dishonest steward, your passion and your pleasure will be in growing your own treasure by pleasing your Lord. You'll be like that faithful steward we looked at last time whose delight was in -- being able to show his master the treasure that he's accumulated, and he knows that all of it is a gift. In Matthew 25:20, he says, *"Master, you delivered to me five talents;*

*here, I have made five talents more.*" The steward is saying, "Here's what you gave me, Master." "Behold," "See, look what I was able to do with your resources!" There's joy in that statement. There is excitement in that statement. Instead of operating on his own power, the faithful steward is moving in the power of the Holy Spirit, and God is his treasure. See, when the treasure that you are seeking is right, then your actions are going to be right as well because you're drawing on the Holy Spirit of God himself. Matthew 12:35 says: *"A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him."* That's why Christ reminds us: *"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."* And what it means is that the kingdom and my stewardship of it will be more important than my job, my career, my friends, my hobbies, and my other passions. In fact, the kingdom must be my passion if the Spirit of God is in me.

Now here's the question: Does that describe you? You know, the shrewd steward didn't merely think and plan; he acted. Redemption, restoration, and new relationships cannot happen unless theory becomes practice. And restoration and new relationships require putting redemption into action. You know, the best example of that with regard to stewardship is not this story that Jesus is telling us but an actual flesh and blood person that he redeemed. It's the

story of Zacchaeus. Now, most of you know Zacchaeus was a tax collector. These folks were regarded with the same disgust as Nazi collaborators. They had sold their own people out to Rome and were given the authority to extort whatever money they could as long as Rome was satisfied, and you could not get lower in the thinking of the Jews than to be a tax collector. Luke 19 describes his encounter with Jesus. It says this: *He (Jesus) entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."* You see, action is what put flesh on Zacchaeus' passion. Theory became practice when he said: *"Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I*

*have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."*

You know, just stop for a moment and consider the radical nature of what it is Zacchaeus just said, what he did, the action that he took. It was radical in three ways. First, he went way beyond the legal restitution that was required by law; and secondly, he very wisely made his offer in an extraordinarily public way. You know, what he said had multiple witnesses. If God is pressing you to act, become accountable for that action by telling somebody, "I think God is telling me to..." fill in the blanks. Just last week I got a phone call from somebody who said I was sitting in my car driving and God told me to give this amount of money to a person who was in need. This person wisely called me up, I became a witness to what God had said to him, and he later on came in and gave me the money, I was able to pass it on to that person. But you all know what it's like when something like that happens, God speaks to you and then you don't tell anybody else and it kind of just fades away and it kind of just disappears. That opportunity for stewardship goes away. Once again what happens is the dot swallows up what you're going to do for the line. Now, if it's critical, God is just going to raise up somebody else to do it, but you've lost that opportunity for stewardship. So if God is moving you, step out of mere good intention into the costliness of true stewardship. Do what Zacchaeus did. Zacchaeus acted. It was his

actions that proved that he had become a brand new creature. What is amazing in this is Zacchaeus did in real life exactly what the shrewd steward did in Jesus' story. Jesus says in verse 9, he says: *"And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings."* Well, consider Zacchaeus. What did he do? He made friends by means of his unrighteously gotten wealth who would indeed welcome him into eternal dwellings. You see, the parable of the shrewd steward was theory. The story of wise Zacchaeus was practice.

You know, it's been 2,000 years since Zacchaeus made this very, very costly decision, and I am certain that every single day since that day, his eternal dwelling is proving how wise a decision he made. You know, God is telling us flat out, while you are still breathing, while you are still in the dot and not yet in the line, make use of the worldly assets you've been given to reserve new relationships for the eternal kingdom. Zacchaeus understood that all of what we now see, feel, hear, taste and touch, that's all going to be gone, and it's going to be gone forever. And so he took what had temporary value and he made that value last forever. That's a challenge that all of us face every single day. You know, I certainly -- I say this to those who are 30 years old and upward, but it applies to almost everybody who's had a taste of what life

is like, is that you spend certain percentages of your life at that point and upwards looking in the rearview mirror, seeing what it is you've done, what you've accomplished for the kingdom in your life. And when you get to my age, what you see in the rearview mirror with regard to the kingdom becomes more and more important. But you know, the dishonest steward, he never saw that at all. He thought shrewdly, he planned shrewdly, and he acted shrewdly and he was certainly a shrewd man but he was not wise. He never understood that there's a way to make a temporary life pay eternal dividends. Now, you might say that Zacchaeus was the exact opposite. He wasn't very shrewd, but he was very wise. Zacchaeus thought and he planned and he acted with very little regard to the fortune he was losing, and in so doing, he built up treasure in the only place that really matters, and that treasure is still paying eternal dividends today.

So the question is: What about you? What kind of a steward are you? Are you a shrewd steward or are you a wise steward? Do you live for the dot or do you live for the line? Do you think, do you plan, do you act for the kingdom of earth or for the kingdom of heaven? It's an incredibly important question to ponder. Let me leave you with Jesus' simple advice from Matthew 6:19: *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves*



*treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Let's pray.*

*Father, I just -- I thank you, I thank you for the trouble that Jesus took to tell us stories, to open up his mind and his thinking into how God thinks and understands the concept of stewardship. Lord, I pray that we would begin to grow in our understanding that stewardship is not just about money. Stewardship is about gifts and giftedness and faithfulness. Stewardship is about faithful planning, faithful thinking, faithful acting. And Lord, I pray for each and every one of us, that we would understand it, that we would be piling up all kinds of investments so that in the line we receive them and not in the dot. The dot is here, the dot is gone, and it's gone forever. Give us the grace, the strength and the wisdom to live for the line. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*